

Sunday after All Saints', Year C

- I used to use sticky notes as reminders – I think a lot of people do this – jot down something that needs to be done or remembered and stick it somewhere prominent
- And this rather simple system of writing down to do list items on sticky notes and sticking them, say, on my computer monitor, worked for me for a while
- Until I had something to do that couldn't be done immediately, or needed to be remembered for more than a short time
- Because, as I came to realize, if I left the sticky note there too long, it became just another part of the scenery – I saw it so often that it ceased to even register on a conscious level, and I more or less stopped seeing it entirely
- Now this may be part of a complex that I've heard referred to as "male pattern blindness" – which is what Loren calls it when I can't find something that I'm looking for that happens to be right in front of me – or it may be something even more universally true
- Not exactly the old axiom about how familiarity breeds contempt – but at least familiarity breeds, what? Lack of attentiveness?
- I bring it up only because I tend to have a similar problem when it comes to the Gospel that we have today – the Beatitudes are just so familiar – even if we do know Matthew's version better than Luke's – they're so familiar that they can be almost just part of the scenery
- We hear "Blessed are you who are poor..." and immediately sort of tune out – or start to hear just what we expect to hear
- If that's the case we miss some of the juicy bits, some of the really wild parts that probably ought to make us all nervous, but maybe none more than our Baptismal families this morning
- It's not too late for them to back out, you see – not too late to say that maybe this Christ we follow asks too much of us
- The early parts are difficult enough, especially the way Luke remembers them: "Blessed are you who are poor"? Blessed are you who are needy, who are beggars? Is this really the faith we signed up for? Blessed are you who are hungry now? Blessed are you who weep now? Blessed are you when people hate you on account of the Son of Man?
- Is any of that really what we expect our faith to be like?
- Or do we expect it to make us, maybe... rich? And full?... and laughing, and happy, and well-liked? The exact things Jesus cautions us against, says woe to those people?

- Do parents baptizing their children really want to ask them to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to bless those who curse them?
- Do any of us really think, in the moment, that our faith demands us to turn the other cheek? Or if someone takes our coat to give our shirt as well?
- And do we really take Jesus at his word when he asks us to give to everyone who begs from us?
- We might even, having seen this passage so often, skip right over some of the middle bits right to “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” – and if we aren’t careful we make this sound very mild, very sanguine, very pollyannaish
- If we aren’t careful, it can seem like one of the easiest standards to accomplish – just a sort of generic and toothless imperative: “be kind”. “Be polite”.
- Until we have to wonder how we’d want to be treated if we were bankrupted by medical bills and lost our house
- Or until we have to wonder how we’d want to be treated if we suffered from a mental illness that made people uncomfortable, or even wrongly think we were dangerous, a fear which would hamper our ability to be part of society in the most basic of ways, like holding down a steady job
- Asking us to do to others as we would have them do to us asks an unbelievable level of empathy of us – one that too often we can’t possibly manage on our own
- Which is why these Beatitudes ultimately point us in the same direction as the font; the same direction as the table
- The direction that leads, often slowly, almost always fitfully, back to God
- In the waters of Baptism we are washed clean of all the ways we will fail to live up to the charge Jesus lays out for us in these Beatitudes – but we’re also baptized into the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to succeed in all the ways we simply couldn’t do on our own
- In Baptism, we are pointed toward the altar, the table wherein we encounter Christ, and are nourished by God with the bread of heaven to do the work that God has laid out for us to do
- The work of doing good to those who hate us. Of turning the other cheek.
- The faith that we are baptized into is an extraordinary and utterly irrational way of life
- To live our lives in the knowledge that God himself dwells not only in the human form of Jesus Christ, but in each and every one of us, including those the world calls “least”, is as

revolutionary as it is unthinkable

- Love our enemies? Give to everyone who begs from us?
- How on earth is that even possible? Is this even something we can do?
- Left to our own devices, the answer is a pretty obvious 'no.'
- But with God working in us and on us, through bread and wine and oil and water, and through this community we know to be the Body of Christ here on earth, a different answer is clear:
- We will, with God's help.